

Dear Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee:

My name is Amy Nocton. I am the World Language Coordinator at RHAM High School where I oversee the Regional District 8 World Language Program. This is my fifteenth year as a teacher of Spanish and Italian.

As a language teacher and a parent of bilingual children ages two and five, I encourage you to support bill 945, which calls for a two year minimum high school world language graduation requirement beginning with students graduating in 2013.

Some would argue that the graduation requirement for second languages is unnecessary because many students currently enroll in a world language in order to get into college. However, it is far more important that students learn a second language in order to communicate effectively so that they can function and compete in a global economy. By relying on college admission requirements as the sole motivation to study a second language, we encourage students to take a minimalist attitude toward languages. As a result, students rarely attain proficiency in a second language, and this leaves them highly unprepared to participate in our diverse, multicultural, and global society.

A second language requirement for high school graduation would place the emphasis on proficiency, and as such would serve as an important step toward an intellectual and cultural paradigm shift. The results would be students who value language as the key to understanding other cultures and communicating with other people, and citizens who possess an important tool for functioning in our locally and globally diverse world.



Let me share two anecdotes. Statewide, there is a shortage of world language teachers, and last year no students graduated from UConn with a degree in world language education. However, last year the University Senate at UConn also approved a dual degree program between the Neag School of Education and the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. This agreement allows students in the school of education's integrated bachelors-masters program to graduate from UConn in five years with both a BA and MA in Education, but also with a BA in their content area. I have two former students now at UConn who plan to pursue the dual degree in order to become high school Spanish teachers. These young women possess the interest and competence to enter this program because they studied Spanish throughout high school. I applaud the University of Connecticut for recognizing the need to produce better prepared teachers in all fields, and see the implementation of this dual degree program as a way of encouraging advanced language study in high schools, and of addressing teaching shortages. Passage of bill 945 will increase the likelihood that more talented students like mine will enter the teaching profession, and enter it better prepared.

Lastly, I'd like to mention my son's kindergarten class, where students speak Spanish, French, German, Norwegian, Chinese and Sinhalese in addition to English. The children are proud of their second languages and enjoy teaching each other new words. We must honor these skills and heritages, and encourage the talents of our older students interested in becoming proficient in other languages. I urge you to pass proposed bill 945. Thank you.